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UNCLAS MANAMA 000845

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AND MEPI

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR TO JUSTICE O'CONNOR

1. Following is the text of a letter the Ambassador sent directly to Justice O'Connor.

Begin text:

June 5, 2004

Dear Justice O'Connor:

As I prepare to leave Manama to serve as Counselor for Political-Military Affairs in Baghdad, I wanted to update you on judicial reform in Bahrain. You once told me that you did not want the Arab Judicial Forum (AJF) to be another one-off event.⁸ I can say with pleasure that judicial reform in Bahrain has hit the ground running.

Thanks to the AJF's ability to identify judicial reform needs, MEPI approved funding for ABA's judicial reform program. ABA's resident legal expert John Hermina has been in Bahrain since January 2004. John works directly with Justice Minister Al Arrayed and together they have begun major changes at the Justice Ministry.

In January, John Hermina accompanied a group of Bahraini prosecutors to France and the United States for training. Shortly after his return, the Ministry of Justice contracted the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance (BIBF) to train judges in commercial law. The Justice Minister was telling me the other day that 17 judges attended the latest seminar on Islamic Banking and Money Laundering. Sessions have been fully attended, vibrant and interactive. John is now working with BIBF to develop a full continuing education curriculum.

To increase transparency, the Ministry of Justice placed last February its very first public announcement for the recruitment of 20 new judges. Our contacts in the legal community told us that this bold move is confirmation that the Minister is serious about reform and more positive changes are coming.

In an unprecedented move, the Justice Minister sacked in March six Shari'a Court judges who were known for accepting bribes and coercing sex from female litigants. I recall Minister Al Arrayed telling me that reforming Shari'a courts was off limits. Women activists have publicly lauded this move.

In April Minister Al Arrayed and John Hermina started to tackle alternative dispute resolution by establishing an Office of Mediation. Based on criteria established by the Ministry, the Court Clerk now is able to give a case a mediation date in lieu of a court date. In May the Justice Ministry completed a survey to assess the current conditions of its IT systems so it can install new software for a case management system.

Minister Al Arrayed assures me that he will sustain the momentum. In fact he and John Hermina traveled to Cairo last week to tour Egypt's Judicial Institute. The Minister was able to observe first-hand Egypt's judicial training program for new judges and spent time interviewing new judges.

All these recent changes were only possible due to your willingness to get involved with judicial reform in the Middle East and the Arab Judicial Forum. Your efforts were well spent.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ronald E. Neumann
Ambassador
NEUMANN